

Borne the Battle

Episode # 145

Jan Ohrstrom—Army Veteran, Professional Wrestler, Documentary Producer, VA Employee

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/60302/borne-the-battle-145-jan-ohrstrom-army-veteran-professional-wrestler-va-employee/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

[00:00:10] OPENING MONOLOGUE:

Tanner Iskra (TI):

Let's get it! Wednesday, May 15th 2019- *Borne the Battle* brought to you by the Department of Veteran's Affairs. I am your host, Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. Hope everyone else had a good weekend outside of podcast land. I just got back from a trip out West to Humptulips, Washington. Unfortunately, uh, I had to go and attend a family funeral. Uh, seems like every time you're in the military or if you work away from your hometown- the only time you're able to visit your hometown and your family and friends are funerals and weddings, which sucks-sucks a lot. The last two have been funerals- the next one will be a wedding and I am gonna be excited for that. So, shout out to my family out there. A couple of reviews and comments since I've been gone. Uh, first one is from goodhumorfan- "Good stuff. A good podcast for up to date information. The guests are interesting and the host is relatable." Well, thank you for the review goodhumorfan and I'm happy to be able to- I'm happy you're able to relate to me- absolutely. The next one is from "sennars" I'm an Army Vet- four tours in Afghanistan. Love the show and the information about the VA. I'm glad you're able to pull something from this podcast. Uh, if there's anything that I can do to help you, please email me at podcast.va.gov. The last one was from our blog from last week. It is from Robert Rybeck: "Thank you for all you do for Veterans- it's great. Everyone supports Veterans today. As a Veteran of the Vietnam War, when I returned to the States, I was not supported. I was made fun of, harassed at work, and finally, quit my job. I still suffer from that." Robert, I can't explain the amount of regret that you Vietnam Vets- uh- had to endure when you first came back and if there's any consolation, I think the pendulum must turn for the post 9/11 Vets, because of what you and others endured. If there's anything that I can do to help you- uh- please email at podcast.va.gov and I hope to point you in the right direction. With that being said, we

are at sixty-eight percent to our bonus “Good Morning, Vietnam-Mel Brooks” episode of *Borne the Battle*. I have been, of course, promoting this every week- that Adrian Cronauer of “Good Morning, Vietnam” interviewed the legendary producer, director, and actor Mel Brooks and it was originally to be used for another product and that product fell by the wayside. This interview still happened. It was dropped in my lap and I hope to bring it to you very, very soon. Once we get to hundred combined ratings and reviews on iTunes or Stitcher or whatever podcast app or choice that you have, I look forward to bringing that to you as a bonus episode here on *Borne the Battle* and I will do that as soon as we reach one hundred reviews and ratings. No news releases of note this week. However, it is still Mental Health Awareness Month and in observance of Mental Health Awareness month, VA is launching a new campaign called the “Moment When” in recognition of the resilience of those who have served our country to honor their sacrifices and to learn and be inspired by their amazing stories. Mental Health Month is also an opportunity to build awareness of mental health challenges and treatment options and to let people know that recovery is possible. This campaign is part of our “Make the Connection” program, where nearly five hundred veterans have shared their stories of strength and recovery. “Make the Connection” also features a resource locator where Veterans, their family, and their friends can find local support. To learn more, visit www.maketheconnection.net/mhm . [Link to Make the Connection’s website] This is also the last week of Carry the Load’s partnership with the National Cemetery Administration. Carry the Load is a nonprofit dedicated to providing active, meaningful ways to honor and celebrate the sacrifices made by our nation’s heroes- the military veterans, first responders, and their families. This week is the last leg of the three national relays as their American flags make their way to Dallas, Texas for the Carry the Load-Dallas Memorial March. Carry the Load’s Midwest relay will visit the Dayton National Cemetery in Dayton, Ohio May 15th- today- at 10:00 am. They will visit Cave Hill National Cemetery in Louisville, Kentucky on May 16th tomorrow at 1 pm. Those last two times will be in Eastern Standard Time. From there, the Midwest route will cross into the Central Standard Time. Starting with Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis on May 18th at 7:30 am. It will then visit the Jefferson City National Cemetery in Jefferson City, Missouri on May 19th at 8 am. Their last National Cemetery along the Midwest route will be at the Omaha National Cemetery on May 22nd at noon. Those last three are Central Standard Time. Along the East Coast route, they will be at Marietta National Cemetery in Marietta, Georgia today May 15th at 8am. They will then be at the Chattanooga National Cemetery in Chattanooga, Tennessee tomorrow

May 16th at 3 pm. Those last two times are Eastern Standard Time. Following Chattanooga, the Carry the Load East Coast will visit the Memphis National Cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee on May 20th at 12:30 pm. The last national cemetery along the East Coast route will be at Little Rock National Cemetery in Little Rock, Arkansas on Tuesday, May 21st at 4pm. Those last two times are Central Standard Time. And finally, the last national cemetery along the West Coast route is today in El Paso, Texas at Fort Bliss National Cemetery at 12:30 pm- that is Pacific Standard Time. For more information on Carry the Load, either A) Go to the show notes and click on the link to the blog or B) go to carrytheload.org. [Link for more information on Carry the Load] If you listen on the archives, back when Tim Lawson interviewed myself, I explained professional wrestling got me into podcast listening. Not that I still watch wrestling, as a fan of Monday Night and the Attitude Era, I would listen to podcasts that talked about the behind the scenes of that era. Through that, I still- I'm up to date on "the business". So, for the first time in a long time, independent wrestling is going through a sort of renaissance. With the newly formed AEW's first paperview coming up this month, it seemed like the right time for this interview. This Army Combat Veteran is an independent professional wrestler. He's also a documentary film producer. His documentary, "Valhalla Club", is currently on Amazon Prime. It details the experience of a veteran wrestling stable, how they rely on each other, and how they fight PTSD through wrestling. The stable and the wrestlers have been featured in numerous articles- *Rolling Stones*, *Vice* and they were on the very first episode of Comedy Central's new show- *Klepper*. Our interviewee is also a VA employee who takes what he knows and gives back to the military community. So, without further ado, I bring to you Army Veteran Jan Ohrstrom. Hope you enjoy.

[00:08:11] Music

[00:08:27] INTERVIEW:

(TI): Man, this is great, because my very first podcast that I really listened to a lot was *Something to Wrestle* with Bruce Prichard and- uh- *Talk Is Jericho*, which are two wrestling podcasts.

Jan Ohrstrom (JO): Yeah, those are good ones. I have actually reached out to both about the "Valhalla Club" documentary and neither of them got back to me yet. I hope they do.

(TI): Sure.

(JO): I think it'd be cool to talk to them about that- I've never met Jericho, but I have met- uh- the Prichard's when I was doing my WWE tryouts. They're fine, they're professional. But, you know, to be on that level with them would be pretty cool.

(TI): Absolutely. So, I'm happy to have wrestlers on the podcast, you know. I'm happy to find a- uh- veteran wrestler. Now, you started wrestling before you served, right?

(JO): Yes- yeah, yeah, yeah. It was- it's been- my, uh, life dream since I was four to be with WWE- then WWF and I- uh- I started training. I used to live in- outside of Chicago and my dad relocated when I was a teenager to California and I found a wrestling school about twenty miles from where we were living and I started training shortly after I got my driver's license when I was sixteen.

(TI): Oh wow.

(JO): Yeah.

(TI): About what year was that?

(JO): That was in '97 and- uh- to put it into perspective, at that time when I started training, who was there? Chris Daniels had just left. Uh, Frankie Kazarian was there. Ricky Reyes, Rocky Romero- I don't know if you're familiar with these names.

(TI): Absolutely. Uh, Fallen Angels Christopher Daniels- absolutely.

(JO): Yeah, he's-

(TI): He's been- he is- he's all over the place.

(JO): He is- he is- all these people came from- uh- School of Hard Knocks in San Bernardino, California- uh- EWF. Shortly after I came through- uh- a little guy by the name of Joey Ryan showed up and Scorpio Sky Andrews. All these people that- uh-we got- you know, we did this SoCal thing together and now, they're all doing great, great things in the wrestling industry.

(TI): Well, that's great to have that- that- those training- uh- partners, you know. Absolutely.

(JO): Yeah.

(TI): I'm sure you learned a lot from them and they learned a lot from you. It must have been great.

(JO): Oh, yeah. Absolutely. It was crazy. It's just one of those things you look back and you're like, "Oh my god, all these people beginning-" and the practices were so intense and so fun. But, you know, I look now and I see how some people train and I'm like, "They wouldn't have lasted three days."

(TI): [Laughter].

(JO): You know, trying to keep up with Kazarian in the ring. It wouldn't- it wouldn't have gone well. [Laughter]

(TI): Absolutely. Who, um, who was your trainer?

(JO): Legendary Jesse Hernandez

(TI): Okay.

(JO): He- he, uh-he ran the School of Hard Knocks since it started in '95, I think. He's still running it to this day- the League with it and the Empire Wrestling Foundation.

(TI): Yeah.

(JO): He still runs it and guys are still coming through and all that.

(TI): And that's down in San Bernardino? In California?

(JO): Yup. San Bernardino, California.

(TI): Gotcha. So, you started wrestling when you were sixteen in '97. That- that was right in the middle of the Attitude Era. Man, I remember those days as very well. Uh- what prompted you to stop and join the military?

(JO): Uh...9/11

(TI): Okay.

(JO): Uh, I was a- I was a college student going to art school, because I was going to design video games as a backup if pro wrestling didn't work out and-uh-

(TI): Solid career choice, solid career choice.

(JO): Right? [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(JO): And-uh- 9/11 happened and I have a- I come from a strong lineage of military. You know, I couldn't shake it. After a couple of months, I was like, "I gotta- I gotta go and do this." And, uh-

(TI): So, you joined right after 9/11?

(JO): Uh- a couple of months after 9/11. I shipped off- uh- to basic training in June of '02. So, yeah. I went June of '02 to June of '06.

(TI): Wow. So, that was your full service- '02-'06. You did have a couple of hard deployments- uh- correct?

(JO): Uh, yeah-well, just the one long deployment. It was thirteen months in Iraq. It was a .50 Cal Gunner, yeah.

(TI): While you were in, who was your either your best friend or your greatest mentor?

(JO): My- uh- best friend and my greatest mentor while I was in service was my buddy- one of my best friends to this day-Mike Solimine. Uh, because when I came in as a C3, he came in as a C4. And he was very much-very, very hard and- and- uh- like, constantly on my case to do my job better and- but that was because he expected a lot out of me, since I expected a lot out of myself. So, he pushed me and wouldn't accept me not giving my best. And, uh, you know- I ended up passing him in rank. I became an E5 before he did. He was- uh- a very- I couldn't have gotten to that point without his discipline, without his knowledge, without his mentorship- without him constantly, constantly pushing me to better myself and not accept- not accept laziness- not accept mediocrity from myself. Those are lessons I still take to this day. If it

wasn't for him-uh, you know, I couldn't tell you how my military career-uh –well, not military career-but those four years of service would have went for me.

(TI): That's high praise saying- uh- E4 guy to E5. That's pretty high praise. And, uh, why- what was the- why did you decide to exit the military?

(JO): Uh, so, when I went into the military, I- I- I- even though I agreed to keep an open mind about it- I was always kind of looking at it as I'm just gonna do my time and then move on to the next phase of my life, unless there was something that I just couldn't pass up. When I was in- when I was in in Iraq- in '04, WWE came through and they did the tribute to the troops.

(TI): Oh, yeah.

(JO): And they came to my base and- I- uh-

(TI): Which base was that?

(JO): I was on FOB Summerall which was in Bayji, Iraq. It was about a half hour north of Tikrit. Uh-

(TI): Wow, that's out there.

(JO): Yeah, it was.

(TI): That was out there.

(JO): [Laughter]

(TI): [Laughter]

(JO): Um, so, long story short- I- uh- when the guys came through, I don't remember all the wrestlers that were there, but I remember Rick Foley. I remember Charlie Haas and, uh- I remember one of my all-time favorite wrestlers Eddie Guerrero was there. It was actually-

(TI): Oh, man.

(JO): -the last one because he had died the next year before the next one came through. So, this was his last tribute to the troops.

(TI): Yeah, wow.

(JO): And I was talking to him because he knew my mentor and- uh-

(TI): Eddie was, uh-he passed away when I was out there in Iraq. So, it's funny that you mention Eddie Guerrero and Eddie was one of my favorite wrestlers.

(JO): He was a legit, like, good dude and he was so entertaining in the ring. I- uh-I have a tribute to a troop shoot that he autographed for me. I've never worn it at all. I just keep it as a memento-uh-and it was-he was one of those dudes, man, he- he just loved being around people. He was one of the first people- a lot of people don't know this- Tribute to the Troops is a volunteer thing. You got to volunteer to go because it is in a war zone and he was one of the first people-

(TI): Wow.

(JO): -that wanted to go do that. Uh, because he just wanted to go see the troops. He wanted to go out there and support and- uh- people know- I think a lot of people overlook that. When WWE goes out there, it's not- they're not required to. They have to volunteer and sign off on a bunch of stuff, because of where they're going.

(TI): Sure.

(JO): And the people out there want to do it because they- they want to do it. Him always being one of the first ones always meant a lot to me.

(TI): And they weren't even- they weren't even at, like, your normal USO stops stuff. It sounds like they went way out there to where you guys were.

(JO): Yeah, they do.

(TI): It's pretty amazing.

(JO): Vince McMahon is an insane, die-hard, military supporter and he made it clear from the people I know in the- in the loop that- that he wanted to go see as many people as possible and he didn't care- he didn't mind if he had to go to, like, some rural outpost two-hundred miles in nowhere. If we could do it, he wanted to do it.

(TI): So, Vince was there with them.

(JO): Oh, yeah. Vince-oh, yeah.

(TI): He came out- he came out to that post?

(JO): Mhm.

(TI): Wow, that's amazing.

(JO): I had brought up- I said, you know, this is my dream. I want to do this. Like, what- what do you recommend I do to get noticed by WWE? And Eddie- uh- had me to talk to this other guy who was just standing there- just a normal dude- I pitched the story, I pitched myself. He told me to go talk to this other guy. So, he brings over another guy. Well, long story short, that guy was John Laurinaitis who was- at that time-

(TI): Johnny Ace?

(JO): Johnny Ace, yeah. He was the guy under Vince and- um- Johnny Ace said, "When you get out, I will give you a try-out." Uh, you know, and he gave me his personal cell and he gave me his email. He said, "You just got to call me when you get out." And, so, now there was no reason for me to-

(TI): Wow.

(JO): -to stay, because I had a guaranteed try-out for my dream- leaving.

(TI): Sure, sure.

(JO): And- uh- he held true to his word, man-he held true to his word. I called him when I got out and he gave me his try-out. They put me on Monday night RAW and then ESW and- uh- you know-

(TI): You had a- you had a couple- a couple of matches in the WWE?

(JO): Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

(TI): Gotcha. Were they- were they dark matches? Or were they-were they-

(JO): No, they were squash. Uh, they were squash matches on TV. Uh and uh- unfortunately, so, I did mine July '07. What happened July of '07-or I think it was early July or late June- but that was when Chris Benoit- that whole thing went down. And- uh- it was crazy-

(TI): Got you.

(JO): You got this try-out and you think you did really well and then, be told that, "Because of this incident, we're kind of not bringing anyone on right now." So-

(TI): Sure.

(JO): So, you had to go back to the drawing board and-

(TI): Exiting- exiting the military- it got you back into wrestling. I mean, Johnny Ace helped you get back. Even though you had a couple of a squash matches and it may not have worked out. It got you get back into wrestling, right?

(JO): Yeah, that's correct and it was a good thing it did, because I was struggling readjusting- uh- I didn't- I thought- uh- mentally everything was fine and really, looking back at that time of my life, I was not- I was not adjusting well. I really wasn't. I was having a difficult time with work-life balance, trying to chase this dream, family life-uh, just processing what I had been through in combat. It doesn't help that I had lost a couple of friends-not only in service, but after I got out, some friends that stayed ended up-

(TI): Oh, wow.

(JO): -being killed over there. You know, it just- all of it just adds up and I wasn't processing it the right way. I- uh-

(TI): Wrestling helped- wrestling helped you through that?

(JO): It did. It really did, man. When we did "Valhalla Club", the documentary, we had- we promised each other that we had to- you know, we had to be forthright and candid about our struggles, because the whole- the whole, underlying reason we did "Valhalla Club" was that we wanted to reach out and help men and women who are struggling. We were getting just too upset with the number of veterans who were taking their own lives every day.

(TI): Sure.

(JO): So, we wanted to reach out and just expose our weaknesses, our struggles, our demons- so that people know that they aren't alone. For me, you know, I- I dealt with all of it by drinking and- and- uh- it's one of those things it just- I didn't use it right. I- I didn't have the right outlet and it was killing me inside-

(TI): Sure.

(JO): -because I was just miserable. When I- when I-

(TI): So, was there- was there- was there a time between your try-out and, like, this dark time- was it after your try-out, before you started independent wrestling? Was there a time that you didn't wrestle?

(JO): Uh, there was- no- there wasn't a time I didn't wrestle. I was wrestling pretty frequently around. I was just- I was just drinking way too much while I was doing it and- uh-

(TI): Gotcha.

(JO): I did take time off of wrestling in 2009, because I got into an auto accident and that just made matters worse, because I couldn't do anything. Uh, but- it was wrestling that really saved me, because the more I focused on wrestling- mentally, I had that outlet to process stuff not only creatively, but also- also, physically. You know, you had to mentally commit to this workout schedule- eating right and- uh, using weights in MMA to be a physical outlet and then, artistically, looking at you want to create this character, how you want to design - whether it be a face -

(TI): Sure.

(JO): Uh- and then, for me, another thing for me was that I do struggle being among crowds like many men and women. You know, when you're a pro-wrestler out there- you don't know- it could be six people, it could be six hundred. Uh-

(TI): Yeah.

(JO): -in a crowd and- and you gotta go out there and entertain it. It really-it really makes you face these struggles-uh- and go out there. It's still kind of a safe environment- a good environment to- uh- build on yourself.

(TI): Got you. You mentioned- uh- “Valhalla Club” and that’s your wrestling stable? A wrestling stable of Veterans?

(JO): Yes.

(TI): I watched the documentary you and your stable produced. It’s thirty minutes long. It’s on Amazon Prime. What was behind making it? Like, who decided that we should make it? Who- uh- how was it being produced? How did it go down?

(JO): Okay- uh- so, the- the Valhalla Club’s story was something that was in my head for a couple of years, because as I was wrestling all around, more people were coming up to me after shows and saying, “I appreciate what you’re doing. My uncle’s over there, my brother’s over there-my nephew-whatever. And it was cool to interact with more people and I felt like there was-there was something there, but when I came out in ’06, I was like the only one in SoCal- in Arizona- that was a current combat veteran. So, I didn’t want- uh- the story to be just about me, because I don’t feel the story is about me. I think it’s about all men and women in the services who had been through combat and what their readjusting struggles are. Um, so- it was just one of those which was always on the backburner and then, I started working more and more in Texas as the years went on and, uh, I just met more people who had been over there. Just talking and, you know, networking with them. Stuff started coming out about their struggles until I was shooting the breeze with Brysin and Eddie and I was like, “Man, I got this idea. Call me an idiot if you want, but here’s what I’m thinking.” And right away, they were both like, “I’m down. Let’s do this.” And- so- having them already behind the project, I- through friends of friends- I got in touch with an independent filmmaker and his name was Brad Maurice. He was in the middle of editing his first feature indie film and I had taken him out to lunch. I pitched this idea of what I wanted to do-

(TI): Yeah.

(JO): -and he- fortunately, it worked out for me. His father was a Vietnam Vet who had really bad PTSD after Vietnam and- uh- this was an issue that was real special to him. He totally-

(TI): It hit hard for him.

(JO): So, yeah-very, very much so. He signed off and he was like, "Yeah, I'll do it." We sat together and kind of figured out how to- how to produce this thing. Uh, I say Kevin Smith style, only in the sense that- because Kevin Smith made his first movie off of a shoe string budget and that's-

(TI): Yeah.

(JO): -what we had to do. [Laughter] We went out and we did. We spent a lot of hours and minimal money to put this thing together and- uh -it was a-

(TI): Now it's on Amazon.

(JO): Yeah, now it's on Amazon and I believe- I think I can say this now, but we're in talks to have it shift over to Netflix.

(TI): Oh, that's cool.

(JO): I can say we're in the talks to do that. So, it's-you know, crazy and now- and also, this thing went from this idea to- uh- in the past two years, we've been- it's crazy, you know, that WWE is very much aware of this project. Uh, we've been covered by *Vice*, *Rolling Stones*, *Sports Illustrated*, Telemundo, ABC, NBC-

(TI): Solid.

(JO): Now, uh, we're doing a big thing with Comedy Central.

(TI): Yeah, you got a lot of good press from- uh- from that- I noticed when I was doing- when I was doing my research. I was like, "Oh my god, you guys- you guys have been featured-

(JO): Mhm

(TI): -everywhere. The one thing I got about- I got out from that documentary is how raw you guys- you guys opened up. You guys talked about everything that you guys experienced.

(JO): Thanks, man. I appreciate that. Uh, I appreciate your words on that. We were- we wanted to go raw and it was- it was really emotional making it. Uh, there was stuff in there that, you know-um, that my kids and my friends didn't even know about. Now that I think about it, my mom didn't even know about a bunch of the stuff, as well, until she had-uh-

(TI): Wow.

(JO): -went through it-uh, I'm sorry-saw the documentary. Uh, we- you know, for me personally, I had to open up about, you know, multiple times I almost died out there and-um, you know, then I think about my friends who didn't come back. It all kind of- it all kind of like-

(TI): Yeah.

(JO): -takes its toll on you. Um- additionally, we have- we live in an age where there's photo-documentation of so much. I was able to- on one hand, I was able to show cool photos of what I went through- like these aftermath, these IED explosions, and the-uh, the car bomber running the gate at Fort Summerall on June 1st, '04. At the same time, I can't look at those pictures and not go back to that day. You know what I mean- not go back to those times.

(TI): Absolutely.

(JO): And it was a- it was a very deep, personal challenge that-uh-all of us went through. I remember Eddie talked about the one time he was in a fire fights longer than the entire time- I think it was longer than the entire one hundred hour war.

(TI): This is Eddie in the-

(JO): In the documentary-yeah, yeah. He was a medic and he saw some-uh-absolute craziness out here, you know. He opened up some of his struggles and his demons on that too.

(TI): In the documentary, I think Eddie is the clown, correct? He's a clown?

(JO): Yeah, yeah. He was one of those characters.

(TI): And-and you have Mr. Studtacular.

(JO): Brysin, yeah.

(TI): Uh, what are those guys like-to work with, to be around, you know? What do you- How do you guys feed off of each other?

(JO): Well, the- you know, it's a blessing and a curse, because like the good and in a positive way-Brysin, Eddie, and myself don't accept anything less than the best the other can give. So, they- Brysin and Eddie bring

out a lot of goodness in me. On a-on a brotherhood note, we check on each other quite a bit. We're always positively supporting each other, you know. We're also- we're also vets-you know, vets in the military, when you feed off of each other, you get kind of wild and out of control. Uh, you know, we like to do that in the ring and backstage- having fun, joking around, being silly-stuff like that. But Brysin and Eddie are insanely loyal, great human beings. They gave me a lot of support for this project and they- uh- I know they've expressed a number of times how it's helped them and- uh- it's really cool. It's a been a really interesting brotherhood- uh- forming with them and going through all this stuff together.

(TI): So, in the- in the documentary, you had some footage of Matt Hardy-

(JO): Mhm.

(TI): -during his- when he was doing his broken gimmick a couple years ago. Talk to me about that. What was- what was that footage? What were you doing with Matt?

(JO): Matt Hardy was in Dallas doing a seminar and Brysin was up there- uh- learning from him. Matt Hardy- uh- is also a very big military and veteran supporter. So, when he was coming up here to Dallas, we just went out there and shot the breeze with him. We told him, "Hey, we're filming this. Are you- is it cool if we, you know, we film you for a little bit and you can talk us?" And he was 100% down- like no questions asked. He was more than happy to be a part of it and-uh-

(TI): He's big- he's big in the digital media space with his broken gimmick and- and documentary and Matt Hardy Version One, you know. I think when it comes to digital media like that- he's probably pretty open to it.

(JO): Yeah, he's creatively- he's one of the most creative people I've seen in the wrestling industry and he knows how to harness the power of digital media. He's really good with that. Um, yeah-so, it was cool to have him. It was cool for me to be a- in the mid-90s, when the Hardy's were like the big, high-flying tag team guys-

(TI): Oh my god.

(JO): -yeah, you know- Matt Hardy's here on my film, you know what I mean? It's kind of surreal.

- (TI): [Laughter] Those were some good days in wrestling, man. The- the Attitude/early Aggression days- a lot of good influences there.
- (JO): Oh, yeah. It's- it's kind of hard to be repeated, man. Everything you can think about society-wise and entertainment-wise lined up for that to explode and-uh-you know, there were many crazy moments and memories that have transcended into just straight-up pop culture that, you know, can never be removed, which is awesome.
- (TI): Yeah. Man, it was a really good and interesting documentary from a veteran's perspective-listening to the stories and understanding, you know-it was really raw and I appreciate you sending me that. So, you're also a VA employee, correct?
- (JO): Yes.
- (TI): What do you do for the VA?
- (JO): I'm a program analyst in OBPI, located out here in Austin, Texas.
- (TI): What- what- what does that entail? What- what- what is OBPI, you know?
- (JO): OBPI is the Office of Business and Process Integration. I do a lot of-uh-project management work-working on, for example, some stuff I do right now is work on projects to help VBMS, which is the claim system used for veteran's claim compensation for education, pension, and trying to increase the abilities of that to help more veterans get more benefits quicker and more efficiently.
- (TI): That's great. That's got to be-um -a little bit rewarding to know you can affect those types of processes.
- (JO): Oh, absolutely. True story-when I filed my claim for compensation in '06 right when I got out of service, my folder got lost and it was lost for four years. When we finally found it, we were able to move forward with a lot, but I get to be on projects to make sure that doesn't happen to any other veteran and that is very rewarding for me.
- (TI): What is one thing you learned in service that you apply today?
- (JO): One thing I learned in service is that it takes five seconds of craziness that can completely change your life. A lot of people kind of tie that in

to combat-five seconds of craziness can change the outcome, which is true and five seconds of craziness can save someone's life, which I do feel is true. But with me-it was just different times in the military, where you're just volunteering to go do something. For example, I was bored and I asked Top (which is first sergeant in the army)- I was like, "I got nothing to do. Is there a detail or something I could go on?" And they ended up sending me to the Czech Republic for thirty days, which was fun, you know. Uh-

(TI): Oh my god.

(JO): [Laughter]

(TI): I bet it was. [Laughter]

(JO): The big one to me was always-it was the WWE thing. If I had not taken that five seconds and just gone to Eddie Guerrero and said, "Hey, this is what I want to do. What is- what do you think?" I wouldn't have gotten my WWE tryout, you know, and my whole life would have been changed.

(TI): Mhm.

(JO): It was those five seconds of crazy and just going for it-just saying, "Screw it. I'm just going to go for it and see what happens." And, you know, that is it.

(TI): Five seconds of craziness can change your life-noted. So, what are the future goals for Dynamite?

(JO): I'm coming off a leg injury right now. I had- when we did the County Central filming in December, I landed weird against the ring. Long story short, I had a huge hematoma-a big, big, big bruise on my leg and-uh-it knotted up to the size of my fist. It was like a baseball size. It wouldn't go away, so I had to have surgery to remove it and-uh-so, I just now- I'm three weeks into training and I've only taken minimal bookings upcoming. I'm wrestling at Dream Con in Waco. There's a big thing going on if any of you listeners had heard of the show called, "The Mighty Morph of Power Rangers". Uh, Brysin is going to have a wrestling match against Jason David Frank who was the original green Power Ranger.

(TI): Oh, no way.

(JO): Yeah, it's a big thing that's been coming on and it's really cool to watch. I'm so proud of Brysin for this.

(TI): When is that?

(JO): The match is going to take place in July. So, I can send you- I'll send you the link after the show, if you'd like. You can check it out.

(TI): Yeah, yeah-we'll put it in the show notes and we'll- we'll make it accessible to everyone. Uh, send me the links to everything. Is there anywhere people can follow you?

(JO): Yes-

(TI): Or "Valhalla Club" or- or your whole stable?

(JO): Yes, absolutely. On Facebook, you can find us at Valhalla Club the Documentary. On Instagram, it's the same thing. Eddie can be found at the Official Eddie Wittern. Brysin can be found as a Mr. Studtacular. You can look for me under Scars and Stripes.

(TI): Scars and Stripes-what's that?

(JO): It's a part time clothing brand I do. It's also where I put a lot of my stuff where you can find me for wrestling or other, different ventures.

(TI): Got you. Very cool, very cool. What is one veteran or nonprofit in the veteran community that you are personally excited about what they're doing?

(JO): Oh, that's a very good question. That's a very, very good question. So, there's- it's such an interesting question, because you've got a lot of vets who do a lot of really good things. I've always noticed there is a bridge with the veterans civilian divide and Rob Riggles has crossed that or at least, built that bridge-uh-very, very well and he is very positively received by media and the veteran community. He uses that-uh- platform to help veterans and, you know, that's-he legit doesn't have to. The fact that he does shows his passion for those men and women who served. Like- that- that is one of the things that just stands out for me- that he would be the one right now. Hopefully, I'd be honored if, one day, wrestling or movie-making whatever gets me onto that level where I can be on that par with him.

(TI): Is there something that I didn't ask that you think is important to share?

(JO): The only thing I'm asked to share about "Valhalla Club" and my own experience is-uh-you know, a lot of men and women are- are struggling these days and- and I hope that if any of your listeners and yourself is struggling- that you please reach out and not only get the help- the VA has a tremendous amount of resources. They did play an instrumental role in helping me quit the drinking, largely because of their programs and it was a positive thing. They're out there for veterans to get their- uh- their life, you know, situated. If it's not through the VA, then I hope- you know, whoever it is-that they reach out and find you. Pro-wrestling was an amazing outlet for me and I hope-though pro-wrestling is unique- I hope that if whatever it is-guitar playing, drawing, making music, you know-video gaming, whatever it is. I hope that you take full advantage of it, because there are way too many of us who are losing every day.

[00:37:39] Music

[00:37:47] PSA:

Man 1: Getting out of the military, I was missing this camaraderie.

Man 2: It's frustrating trying to talk to people and they don't understand.

Woman: I would be talking, but I wasn't there with them. You just feel so alone.

Man 3: I still had the anger. I still had the addictions, but we didn't talk about that.

Woman 2: It came to a point where I was like, "I really need to talk to somebody about this."

Man 4: Family more or less encouraged me to go to the VA. You're a veteran, see what they can do to help you.

Woman 3: When you have family, friends-when you have the facilities like the VA and the Vet Center, it gives me-it gives others encouragement to keep moving forward.

Man 1: It's okay to go get help. It's okay to talk to people, because it takes true strength to ask for help.

Man 2: Talking with other veterans was the best method for learning the road map to success.

Man 3: Hear veteran's real stories of strength and recovery at maketheconnections.net

[00:38:48] Music

[00:38:52] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:

(TI): I want to thank you all for coming on the show. It was a really great conversation. This week's *Borne the Battle* Veteran of the Week was submitted by newly-minted Veteran Kenneth Trotter. Kenneth has currently been accepted to attend University of Missouri. He was just selected for the Chancellor's Leadership Course. Kenneth is also going to be using the GI Bill to attend the university. Kenneth, congratulations on your acceptance and getting that DD 214. His submission is Marine Veteran Edgar Huff- a native of Gadsden, Alabama. Edgar enlisted on September 24th, 1942 and was one of the first African Americans to do so. He received his training at the segregated Montford Point in North Carolina. In 1943, just one year later, he became a drill instructor at Montford Point. By 1944, Huff was the field sergeant major of all recruit training at the camp. By late 1944, Huff was a first sergeant serving in Saipan, Okinawa, and in North China. Following World War 2, Huff served as the non-commissioned officer in charge back in Montford Point. Edgar also saw combat in Korea and in Vietnam. On December 31st, 1955, Edgar Huff became the first African American Sergeant Major in the Marine Corps. He retired on September 30th, 1972 having served more than half of his career as a sergeant major. Sadly, Sergeant Major Huff died May 2nd, 1994 at the age of 72. We honor his service. If you yourself would like to honor a *Borne the Battle* Veteran for the week, you can- at podcast.va@gov You can also follow the Department of Veteran Affairs on Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, US Department of Affairs-DEPT Veteran Affairs. You can always find us with that blue check mark. That's it for this week. Thank you for listening and we'll see you next week.

[00:41:01] Music
(Text Transcript Ends)